

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EURE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03

SS-20 USIA-15 SAM-01 COME-00 EB-11 LAB-06 SIL-01

INT-08 ACDA-19 OMB-01 TRSE-00 CIEP-02 NIC-01 DRC-01

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P R 281344Z FEB 74

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8315

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY THE YWGUE

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, UK

SUBJECT: ELECTION DAY MUSINGS

AS THE BRITISH PEOPLE GO TO THE POLLS TODAY, A FEW
GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ARE IN ORDER:

1. CONTRARY TO ALL EXPECTATIONS, THE CAMPAIGN HAS NOT
BEEN BITTER AND DIVISIVE. THE PRIME MINISTER ASKED
THE MODERATES TO STAND UP AND BE COUNTED, AND FOR SOUND
POLITICAL REASONS, EVERYBODY PROMPTLY STOOD UP (WHICH
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WAS NOT WHAT MR. HEATH HAD IN MIND). EVEN MICK MCGAHEY,

COMMUNIST VICE PRESIDENT OF THE MINERS' UNION, DECLARED HE WAS A MODERATE.

2. ALTHOUGH THE MINERS' DECISION TO STRIKE PRECIPITATED THE ELECTION, THE ISSUE OF 'WHO SHALL GOVERN BRITAIN?' BEGAN TO FADE BEFORE THE CAMPAIGN REACHED ITS HALF-WAY POINT. PICKETING HAS BEEN MINIMAL, VIOLENCE NON-EXISTENT, AND DESPITE THE THREE-DAY WEEK, LIFE HAS PROCEEDED FAIRLY NORMALLY.

3. THE DOMINANT ISSUE OF THE CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN THE MANAGEMENT OF THE ECONOMY, ESPECIALLY CONTROL OF INFLATION. COMMUNIST SUBVERSION, EXCESS PROFITS, INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS, SOCIAL JUSTICE, THE COMMON MARKET, DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH, INADEQUATE HOUSING, AND A HOST OF LESSER ISSUES HAVE BEEN DEBATED AT LENGTH, BUT AS PEOPLE GO TO THE POLLS TODAY, THEIR OVERRIDING CONCERN IS PROBABLY THE CURRENT ECONOMIC CRISIS. THEIR VOTE WILL BE INFLUENCED IN LARGE MEASURE BY WHICH PARTY (OR COMBINATION OF PARTIES) THEY BELIEVE WILL GIVE BRITAIN THE STRONG AND COMPETENT GOVERNMENT IT WILL NEED IN THE VERY DIFFICULT TIMES AHEAD.

4. HOWEVER THEY MARK THEIR BALLOTS, IT IS CLEAR THAT MANY OF THEM WILL DO SO WITHOUT ENTHUSIASM. BOTH MAJOR PARTIES HAVE HAD A GO AT SOLVING BRITAIN'S ECONOMIC PROBLEMS WITHIN THE LAST DECADE AND BOTH HAVE FAILED LARGELY DUE TO EXTERNAL FACTORS BEYOND THEIR CONTROL. INDICATIVE OF A WIDESPREAD ATTITUDE IS AN EDITORIAL IN TODAY'S FINANCIAL TIMES THAT URGES THE ELECTORATE TO RE-ELECT THE TORIES MAINLY BECAUSE THE ALTERNATIVES WOULD BE WORSE. SUPPORT FOR LABOR FROM OTHER QUARTERS IS EQUALLY GRUDGING.

5. THIS SENTIMENT IS REFLECTED IN THE SHARP DROP IN PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR BOTH THE MAJOR PARTIES RECORDED BY ALL THE OPINION POLLS. THE FINAL FIGURES ISSUED BY FOUR OF THE BEST RESEARCH ORGANIZATIONS (ORC, GALLUP, HARRIS, NOP) GIVE THE CONSERVATIVES 38.7 TO 40.2 PERCENT OF THE VOTE, LABOR 34.9 TO 37.5 PERCENT, AND THE LIBERALS 20.5 TO 23 PERCENT, WITH ALL OTHERS GARNERING 2.5 TO 3.4 PERCENT. ALLOWING FOR STATISTICAL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ERROR, AND DEPENDING ON WHERE THOSE LIBERAL VOTES ARE, CONSERVATIVES IN THE NEXT PARLIAMENT COULD HAVE ANYTHING FROM AN INCREASED MAJORITY TO A SLIM PLURALITY DEPENDENT ON LIBERAL SUPPORT. TOMORROW WE SHALL ALL BE A LOT WISER.

ANNENBERG

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